

Piping plovers shut down Brigantine drive

By ANDREW JOHNSON Staff Writer, (609) 978-2012

Because a pair of piping plovers are nesting farther south this year at the North Brigantine Natural Area beaches, no driving in the entire beach area will be permitted from today until probably mid-August, giving the endangered birds' chicks time to develop and fly on their own, the state Department of Environmental Protection announced this week.

In the past, piping plovers have hatched offspring a mile farther north of the natural area boundary, necessitating only a partial closure of the beaches to vehicles.

Immature piping plovers, which nest on the beach are susceptible to being struck by vehicles along the shoreline because they are flightless for six weeks after they hatch.

"Because they nest on beaches, piping plovers are among New Jersey's most imperiled species," DEP Commissioner Bradley M. Campbell said. "Intense management measures such as beach closures are sometimes needed to help these precious shorebirds survive in our state."

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service classified the piping plover as an endangered species in 1986.

According to the DEP, piping plover populations have varied between a record low of 93 pairs in 1998 to 138 pairs one year ago.

Under the new restriction, permit holders still may drive along designated beaches on the southern end of Brigantine as well as the small portion adjacent to the natural area.

People still may walk in the natural area, but pets, which disturb the chicks, are banned from the area.

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